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ABSTRACT

To determine whether various indices of "acculturation" would predict attitudes towards family planning was the major purpose of a survey conducted among a highly educated group of Navajo people at Navajo Community College (NCC). Owned and operated by the Navajo Tribe, NCC served as a target survey model due to its 90% population of Navajo enrollees. The survey included questions on respondent's age at first marriage, first language learned in childhood, percentage of life spent in the Navajo Nation, educational level of parents, number of siblings, occupation, religious practices, and level of income. Included also were questions on attitudes towards family planning, value of children, acceptability of abortion, and traditional beliefs on conception and pregnancy. The questionnaire was administered to 53 women and 32 men and results indicated that young Navajo people held attitudes towards family planning different from their parents and grandparents. Students at NCC not only agreed on limiting family size but also favored the availability of family planning services. (NLY)

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FAMILY PLANNING ATTITUDES OF TRADITIONAL AND ACCULTURATED NAVAJO INDIANS

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Introduction

The Navajo Indians live primarily in the Navajo Nation, an area of about 25,000 square miles, or about the size of West Virginia. The Navajo Nation covers a large portion of Arizona, as well as parts of New Mexico and Utah. Until the 1930s, most Navajo households lived off the commercial and subsistence products of sheep herds. During that decade the U.S. government cut the Navajo livestock population in half to reduce a serious overgrazing situation. Since then, wages and public assistance have been the main sources of income (Young 1958:107, 1961:213-296; Wistisen et al. 1975:4,14).

The Navajo population has grown greatly since stock reduction, though the Reservation area has received few additions since about 1920. The population of the Navajo Nation in 1930 was around 35,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1930), and is now about 130,000 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1973:982-95). The crude birth rates are currently in the high 30s for several of the counties in the Arizona portion of the Reservation. The infant mortality rates are about 20 according to the Indian Health Service. The mortality rate is slightly higher than the national rate and life expectancy is rising toward national levels. These figures suggest that Navajo people are in a state of socioeconomic transition toward industrial development. In this context the Navajo Nation can be seen as a region of the United States with many characteristics of a developing country.

A small number of studies give information on the attitudes of Navajo people toward family planning. The earliest of these is Bailey's (1950) study of sex practices and beliefs in Navajo

communities. The study is based on interviews in the early 1940s in the Ramah and Chaco areas, two rather remote rural places in the eastern Navajo Nation. Bailey's informants had little use for family planning. They looked favorably on contraception only when having children would endanger a woman's health. They valued children to help around the house, especially as the parents grew old. Their knowledge revealed little discussion between men and women on sex practices in general. Many thought that conception occurs during menstruation.

Kunitz (1976b) has analyzed attitudes of Navajo people in 1972-73 in communities around the northwest Navajo Reservation, including both rural and industrializing communities. As with Bailey's informants, the older women in this survey considered contraception justifiable only to preserve the health of a woman, but the younger women were more interested in learning about contraception. Women whose husbands favored family planning were more likely to use contraception. Kunitz also suggests that spouses living in "traditional" extended family residence groups are less likely to discuss family planning with each other than are spouses living in "modern" nuclear households. Mean number of pregnancies per woman increases with age, of course, but decreases with education among women under 50. Mean number of pregnancies for women over 50 with no formal education was 13.

Thus, Kunitz' analysis indicates a difference in attitudes between older and younger women and between women living in "traditional" and "modern" circumstances, with the younger and modern women favoring family planning more. This may suggest that attitudes become more

favorable as educational levels rise and industrialization proceeds. Another study by Kunitz in 1976 (1976a) suggests that the practice of family planning may increase as development of the area proceeds. The eastern Navajo Nation is more industrialized now than the western area. Both mortality and fertility rates in the eastern side are lower than in the western area, though still above the national average. However, Kunitz also shows that, for the reservation as a whole, birth rates remain high while death rates (especially among infants) are dropping (Kunitz 1977, 1974).

The Research Problem

In order to learn more about the attitudes and expectations of a highly educated group of Navajo people, we administered a questionnaire survey at Navajo Community College. The College is owned and operated by the Navajo Tribe, is located somewhat near the geographical center of the Navajo Nation, and is 85 miles from Gallup, N.M. (the nearest incorporated town of any size). The student body is 90% Navajo, 5% other Indian, and 5% non-Indian. Over 85% of the sample have two Navajo parents. We discarded all questionnaires from students who indicated that neither parent was Navajo. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether various indices of "acculturation" (modern living circumstances associated with increased industrial development) would predict attitudes toward family planning. The survey included questions on such indices of acculturation as respondent's age at first marriage, first language learned in childhood, percentage of life spent in the Navajo Nation, educational level of parents, number of siblings, type and location of schooling, occupa-

tional preferences, income sources, voting behavior, religious practice, and degree to which respondent considers him- or herself "traditional" or modern along several dimensions. Also included were questions on attitudes toward limiting family size, responsibility for family planning, value of children, acceptability of abortion, and traditional beliefs on conception and pregnancy.

Methods

We administered the questionnaire over a two-day period in 8 of the largest classes at NCC. These included required courses and other courses taught in English or Navajo, to obtain a representative sample of the student body. Ninety-nine students returned questionnaires and we retained 85 of these. The remainder included respondents without a Navajo parent and the inevitable few who gave highly improbable answers such as being married at age 8 and having 15 children by age 19.

Results

The final sample of 85 includes 53 women (62%) and 32 men (38%). The mean age for the entire sample is 23. Mean age at first marriage is 19 years (18 for women, 21 for men). About 34% have at least one child (49% of the women, 20% of the men). Respondents with children had an average of 2. The parents of respondents had an average of 7 living children.

The first language learned in childhood was Navajo for 60%, while 32% learned English first and 7% learned both languages simultaneously. The majority of the respondents have spent 100% of their lives in the Navajo Nation. About half the respondents have registered to vote. Forty percent of the respondents have gone to a traditional medicine man for treatment in the last two years. The

top-ranked sources of income for those financially independent of their parents were, in order, academic financial aid (41%), CETA (30%), wages (22%), public assistance (5%), and other (2%), with financial aid, CETA, and wages accounting for 90% of the responses. Parents of dependent students had as top-ranked sources of income wages (47%), public assistance (27%), livestock (20%), and non-agricultural self-employment (6%), in that order.

The Navajo people in this survey appear to hold attitudes towards family planning quite different from their parents and grandparents. Whereas most of the women over 50 in Kunitz' sample favored family planning only to preserve the health of the mother, the majority of the respondents (50% of the men with 37% neutral, and 75% of the women with 17% neutral) agreed with the statement that a woman should have the opportunity to limit the number of children she wants. However, most of the sample were not in favor of the distribution of birth control methods to 15-year old girls without parental consent (only 20% of the men and 37% of the women agreed with the concept).

While the majority of women in the sample knew that the maximum risk of pregnancy occurrence was not during the time of menstruation, 25% of the women in the sample did agree that intercourse during a monthly period carries a high risk of pregnancy. Obviously this would make teaching of the rhythm method difficult for this subset.

While abortion as a method of birth control was not considered acceptable (50% did not favor it), 20% did agree with abortion and 30% had no opinion. This level of rejection of abortion is less than the researchers subjectively expected. Most of the students were less in agreement with the concepts of having children making them better people, or that it is important to have children, than the data of

Bailey would indicate they might be. The students in the sample do not appear to feel that people want children to help around the house (as labor) or for security as the parents get older (socia[illegible]security in children). Conversely the majority feel that the limiting of family size to increase the standard of living is good and that limiting family size allows each child to have more attention. In general the composite attitude of this young educated population would seem to favor the availability of family planning services.

Summary and Conclusions

The students at NCC are a young and relatively well educated group living in "modern" circumstances. They are younger and have more years of education than Kunitz' informants, and live in more modern circumstances than Bailey's. Therefore, we would expect them to be more sympathetic toward family planning than the informants of Bailey or Kunitz. The results of this survey confirm this expectation, although, because of the sample's homogeneity, our preliminary data do not show a correspondence between variability in attitudes toward family planning and in particular indices of "acculturation." More data need to be collected on a more varied sample to analyze this point. Students tend to agree that women ought to be free to limit the number of children and that one should limit the number of children to provide each with a better standard of living. They tend to disagree with the statement that it is important to have many children. Furthermore, the ideal numbers of children they specify for both Navajos in general (2 men) (4 women) (3) and themselves are below those of Kunitz' younger informants. And these ideal family sizes are certainly well below the 7 children that their parents have had. However, nearly half the

women in our sample have children already, even though their mean age is only 23. In order for these students to acheive their goal of limiting family size to three children, they will need access to more birth control information and devices. Currently, only two family planning programs operate in the Navajo Nation, one from the Indian Health Service and one from the Navajo Nation Family Planning Council. Data collected here indicate that information discreetly provided to younger people on family planning would be more useful than a general advertizing or education campaign aimed at the entire Navajo population.

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NAVAJO COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FAMILY PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE
TABULATION OF RESULTS

1. A woman should have the opportunity to limit the number of children she wants.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	66%	24%	10%
Female	52	75	17	8
Male	30	50	37	13

4. A 15-year old girl should have free access to birth control methods without the consent of her parents.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	30%	28%	42%
Female	52	37	21	42
Male	30	20	40	40

6. The use of birth control pills makes it more likely that a woman will commit adultery.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	26%	45%	29%
Female	52	13	48	39
Male	30	47	40	13

8. Abortion is an acceptable method of birth control.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	16%	34%	50%
Female	52	21	29	50
Male	30	7	43	50

11. It is important to have many children.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	80	15%	43%	42%
Female	50	15	39	46
Male	30	13	50	37

12. Having children will make me a better person.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	31%	38%	32%
Female	52	27	33	40
Male	30	37	47	16

20. Children have a responsibility to help their grandparents and parents financially.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	82	62%	26%	12%
Female	51	63	26	11
Male	31	61	26	13

21. People want a lot of children because they will have lots of help around the house.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	83	27%	33%	40%
Female	52	21	36	43
Male	31	35	32	33

22. People want lots of children because when they grow up some will stay with their parents and look after them.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	83	27%	40%	33%
Female	52	26	31	42
Male	31	29	48	23

23. Limiting the number of children you have is good because then you can provide them with a better standard of living.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	81	61%	27%	12%
Female	51	65	19	16
Male	30	57	37	6

24. Limiting the number of children you have is good because then you can pay more attention to each child.

	N	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Total	85	55%	29%	16%
Female	54	56	28	16
Male	31	52	32	16

FAMILY PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer all questions as completely as possible. If the question does not apply to your personal situation, write NA next to the question. All information in the questionnaire will be completely confidential and will only be used to produce statistical data.

1. Age_____

2. Sex_____

3. Marital status: married single divorced husband or wife/deceased.

4. Your age at first marriage_____

5. Number of children you have_____

6. Your mother's tribal affiliation or ethnic background_____

7. Your father's tribal affiliation or ethnic background_____

8. Number of brothers and sisters you have_____

9. Who looked after you for most of your childhood: ___both parents ___mother only, ___father only, ___ other relative(s), __Foster parents.

10. What language did you learn first as a child:__Navajo__English Other (specify): _____

11. List all the languages you speak:

1. 3.
2. 4.

12. Where do you have a permanent home now?_____

13. How many years have you lived in the Navajo Nation?_____

14. How many times during the last 12 months have you been outside the Navajo Nation (not counting the border towns)?_____ Where?_____

15. How many times during the last 12 months have, you gone to a border town?_____

16. What is the highest grade in school you have completed?_____

17. What is the highest grade your parents or guardian completed?
Mother_____ Father_____ Guardian_____

18. What type of school did you go to for most of your elementary schooling:
___BIA boarding school ___BIA day school ___Mission school
___on Reservation Public school ___off Reservation Public school.

19. Where did you receive most of your schooling: ___In the Navajo Nation or border towns, ___Outside the Navajo Nation and border town.

20. Have you ever been in a vocational training program? __Yes __No

21. If yes, what type of program?_____

22. Why did you come to NCC?_____

_____

23. Have you ever had a wage-paying job? ___Yes ___No

24. If yes, how old were you when you got your first job?_____

25. What type of work did the job involve?_____

26. Do you have a wage-paying job now? ___Yes ___No

27. If yes, what kind of job is it? _____

28. What kind of work would you like to do?_____

29. What kind of work do you expect to do in the future?_____

_____

30. Do you consider yourself financially independent of your parent (s) or guardian (s)? ___Yes ___No

31. If yes, would you rank the following sources of income according to how much you recieved from each this past year (start with 1 for the largest source):

	Rank
wage work	____
financial aid for college	____
CETA	____
Public assistance/social security/retirement	____
Self-employed work other than in agriculture	____
Other (specify_____	____

32. If you do not consider yourself financially independent of your parents or guardians, would you rank the following sources of income according to how much your parents or guardians received from each this past year (start with 1 for the largest source):

	Rank
wage work	____
Public assistance/social security/retirement	____
Self-employed work other than in agriculture	____
Self-employed work in livestock or farming	____
Other (specify)_____	____

33. Have you registered to vote? ___Yes ___No

34. What political party are you registered under?
___Democratic ___Republican ___Independent

35. Have you had a sing during the last two years? ___Yes ___No

36. Has anyone in your family had a sing during the last two years?
___Yes ___No

37. What is your religion: ___Traditional ___Native American Church
___Catholic ___LDS ___Protestant ___Other (specify):_____

38. For women: Did you have a kinaalda ceremony at your first menses? ___Yes ___No

39. : If you, are married, what kind of marriage ceremony did you have: ___Traditional Navajo Ceremony, ___Ceremony with a clergy man
___Both ___Neither

How would you rank yourself on the following scales (circle the rank you would choose):

	Traditional Navajo				General U.S. Society
1. Language(s) you speak	1	2	3	4	5
2. Your schooling	1	2	3	4	5
3. Job(s) you have had	1	2	3	4	5
4. Your income sources	1	2	3	4	5
5. Your career goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. Income sources of your parents or guardians	1	2	3	4	5
7. Your religion	1	2	3	4	5

40. For women: How many times have been pregnant?_____

1. A woman should have the opportunity to limit the number of children she wants.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

2. A man should have the opportunity to limit the number of children he wants.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

3. The decision to have children is the responsibility of the man and woman equally.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

4. A 15 year old girl should have free access to birth control methods without the consent of her parents.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

5. A 15 year old boy should have free access to birth control methods without the consent of his parents.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

6. The use of birth control pills makes it more likely that a woman will commit adultery.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

7. The time a woman is most likely to get pregnant is during her monthly period.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

8. Abortion is an acceptable method of birth control.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

9. Birth control medicine given by a medicine man work as well as the medicine given by an anglo doctor.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

10. A child should be born only if he is wanted.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

11. It is important to have many children.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

12. Having children will make me a better person.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

13. It is wrong to plan how many children you want.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

14. A pregnant woman should not go to a sing. (except blessing way.)

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

15. A mother or father should not go to a funeral during pregnancy.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

16. A pregnant woman should not eat mutton.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

17. The decision to use any form of birth control is up to the man.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

18. The more children you have the wealthier you are.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

19. Abortion is wrong under any circumstances.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

20. Children have a responsibility to help their grandparents and parents financially.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

21. People want a lot of children because they will have lots of help around the house.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

22. People want lots of children because when they grow up some will stay with their parents and look after them.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

23. Limiting the number of children you have is good because then you can provide them with a better standard of living.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

24. Limiting the number of children you have is good because then you can pay more attention to each child.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

25. The best number of children to have in a family is _____.

26. How many children do you want to have?_____.

27. Birth control should be used only if the mothers life is in danger.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

28. Abortion should be used only when the mothers life is in danger.

__Strongly Agree __Agree __No Opinion __Disagree __Strongly Disagree

29. For women: The age I would like to be when I have my first child is. _____

30. For women: Who already have a child, the age I was when I had my first child was. _____